

metallic than that of the Olive-backed Thrush. On the 10th of August I found a Hermit calling to her brood in the undergrowth with a low cluck that was instantly changed to the alarm note when my presence became known.

On the wooded slopes about Shelburne Harbor the Hermit Thrush was apparently abundant. In the hush of the long twilight we would drift far out toward the edge of burnished water, listening to the vesper strains of some late singer that came with infinite sweetness out of the gathering gloom of the farther shore.

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## THE EXALTATION OF THE SUBSPECIES.

BY JONATHAN DWIGHT, JR., M. D.

WHATEVER may be the intrinsic worth of the subspecies, signs are not wanting, at the present time, that its value, especially in the domain of ornithology, is impaired by the undue prominence which it has attained. Some of us hold it so close to the eye that all fields beyond are obscured and the one near object becomes not a part of ornithology but the aim and end of all our research. Our efforts are so one-sided that minute variations of dimension or color are magnified by their very proximity until they afford foothold for the rising flood of names that threatens to undermine the very foundations of trinomial nomenclature. It seems to be forgotten that the subspecies is only a *convenient* recognition of geographical variation within the limits of the species. Its rise began when the distribution of the species of many parts of the globe had been thoroughly determined, and systematists welcomed it as a new and useful outlet for activity. Since that time down to the present, the dividing and re-dividing of old species into geographical races or subspecies has gone on apace—not as a matter of making two blades of grass grow where one grew before but of splitting the one blade.

The luxuriant growth of the subspecies, while unquestionably

due to numerous and complex causes, depends, in a large degree, upon man's natural and proper desire to bestow names upon the objects about him. Unfortunately the giving of a name, be it ever so scientific, is hedged in by no prerequisites of scientific training, and many have been the blunders committed through ignorance and haste. We are, after all, only human, but one of the greatest misfortunes that can befall is when a dim conception of evolution leads us to confuse plasticity of a form to its environment with plasticity in our own brain. We must beware lest we name that which exists only in our expectant mind. A subspecies potential is a fact, a subspecies named, an opinion, for in giving a name we express an opinion which may or may not fit the fact. As a working hypothesis, it is convenient to consider the subspecies as an incipient species, but to name every degree of incipency is pushing matters to a point where the name, by overshadowing the fact, ceases to be the convenient handle for which it is primarily intended. The tail begins to wag the dog, and, in the eyes of some, it really seems to be more important than the dog.

Another, but less potent cause for the rise of the subspecies is found in the unnecessary prominence accorded it in our books and other publications. Wherever we turn we find it, to all appearances, on equal terms with the full species. It is clothed in the same type, while descriptions, measurements, synonymy and other matters are displayed independently as if every name were of equal value. No wonder the impression is created that the subspecies is quite as important as the species and deserving of the same treatment. We forget that, as names multiply, they lose in definiteness of meaning, and that the standard by which races are measured falls in direct proportion to the number of names resulting from new campaigns over old ground. Ornithology, in North America at least, is suffering from too many campaigns.

But, the mind of the young ornithologist is strongly influenced by what his elders do, and if they make much of the subspecies he is likely to do the same. Hence, if we expend so much effort in seeking new lines of geographical cleavage, it is not inconceivable that our successors may reduce our splinters to sawdust and bestow a name upon each and every grain. It is to be hoped,

however, that the limits of the human eye and of the vernier scale will not be the only goal of the ornithologist, for true science does not receive much uplifting from the mere renaming of a few handfuls of skin and feathers. How well revision and renaming have worked in the past, when species were the units, is shown by the long array of synonyms that burden many a page. Synonymy might fittingly be called the science of the blunders of our predecessors, and we ourselves shall need deliverance from an intolerable load of names unless our fragile subspecific refinements are woven of stronger threads. We discover and name trivialities because we like to do it, and new names loom very large even if they mean little. We confuse nomenclature and ornithology, forgetful that names which should be the tools of the ornithologist may easily become the playthings of the systematist. If the subspecies be relegated to its proper place and held in proper perspective, we shall neither flounder in a flood of names nor fail to perceive the opportunities which lie open before us. There is more serious work on hand than the naming of subspecies if the advance of ornithology is to keep pace with that of kindred sciences.

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## YOSEMITE VALLEY BIRDS.

BY O. WIDMANN.

To demonstrate the efficacy of bird protection by exclusion of firearms the Yosemite Valley is an excellent example. During a short stay of three and a half days, from noon of May 21 to early morning of May 25, 1903, fifty-seven species were noticed. The valley is seven miles long by a width of one half to one mile, but only a part of this area in the vicinity of the so-called village was subjected to a close scrutiny, and no attempt was made to investigate the bird fauna of the surrounding higher regions.

Discovered in 1851, the valley with its enclosing peaks was granted by Congress in 1864 to the State of California on condition that it should be held as a "State Park for public use, resort